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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000904

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DEPT FOR AF/C, INL/C/CP AND EB  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA ACTION OFFICERS  
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SUBJECT: CAMEROON ELECTIONS: THE NEXUS BETWEEN CORRUPTION  
AND DEMOCRACY

REF: YAOUNDE 1883

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Chief Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary. High-level corruption is intrinsic to democratic politics in Cameroon. With Cameroonians going to the polls on July 22, critical USG interests in improving governance and democratic processes are affected by the nexus between grand corruption and the financing of political party operations, a connection that undermines both participatory politics and the country's development. Although the problem remains widespread and deeply corrosive, the political conversation is evolving, albeit slowly, towards a condemnation of the corruption-democracy nexus and a search for alternatives. This evolution is not, however, inevitable, and continued pressure on the anti-corruption agenda will be necessary if it is to succeed. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) With national parliamentary and municipal elections on July 22, the functioning of Cameroon's political system has been increasingly in the public eye. Although media coverage has been muted and generally thin on probing analysis, the private press has revealed some disturbing illustrations of the central role that party money plays in shaping the political discourse.

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A Penny for your Vote?  
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¶3. (U) The incumbent speaker of the National Assembly (Parliament), Cavaye Yeguie Djibril, publicly pledged 100,000 CFA (about \$200) to whichever CPDM constituencies in his region were able to deliver 100 percent support for the CPDM candidates. His statement met with condemnation in the press and calls from the Catholic Church that he be prosecuted for violating electoral law, which prohibits offering financial reward in exchange for votes.

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Cash for Conversion  
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¶4. (U) Seeking to erode support for the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) in the Northwest Province it dominates, the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) hosted a rally where party leaders bestowed 1 million CFA (about \$2,000) on a converted SDF activist who had been injured in a political battle many years ago. In case the gesture was not clear enough, the CPDM official asserted this action as evidence that the CPDM "takes care" of its supporters.

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Fortunes to be Made in Party Politics  
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15. (C) In a March 27 meeting with the Ambassador, Transparency International Cameroon President Charles Nguini explained that he had turned down a seat on the CPDM's dispute resolution committee (that adjudicates disputes in party offices and nominations) that he believes was offered to him because of the lucrative income to be made from party hopefuls trying to secure a position.

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Robbing Cameroon to Pay the CPDM  
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16. (C) A grand-scale corruption trial that resulted in a 50-year jail sentence for the former manager of a parastatal corporation (reftel) revealed that substantial amounts of the funds he embezzled (he was convicted for personally pocketing \$22 million, but the total losses exceeded \$100 million) were destined for CPDM party activities. In 2004, for example, the parastatal's records show that \$10,000 was transferred from the agency's coffers to Biya's 2004 presidential campaign. In the previous year, the parastatal contributed \$240,000 to the National Day celebrations, which are practically indistinguishable from CPDM rallies. The public trial provided unprecedented visibility into the relationship between grand corruption and political operations, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the pilfering of parastatal accounts for party (and personal) purposes is the rule, not the exception.

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Reason for Hope, However Faint  
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17. (SBU) There have been, however, some positive signs that the political climate is starting to cool towards such illicit financial relationships. Party activists have complained to Embassy contacts that their activities during this election cycle have stalled for want of cash, explaining that parastatal heads are more stingy with government funds for fear that their largesse may come to haunt them if Biya expands his anti-corruption campaign.

18. (SBU) In addition, the implementation of the Cameroonian law (#2000/15) providing public funding of political party operations and campaigns (and outlawing contributions from abroad) was improved this year. About \$3 million was distributed to 45 political parties contesting the elections (based on previous election results and the number of seats contested in the current election). The breakdown was not made public, but the CPDM would have received the vast majority of the funds. The SDF announced that it was promised about \$440,000 in total, including around \$10,000 per parliamentary race it is contesting. No one seems to believe this public finance scheme can resolve the current system, but it has sparked discussion about possible alternatives.

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Comment: US Pressure Helps Break the Fix  
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19. (C) The nexus between corruption and political activity functions like a vicious circle: campaigns unhindered by political agendas or platforms attract voters through material incentives (food, drink, farm implements, party paraphernalia, and cash), and public officials owe their position to CPDM party patronage. From working level accountants to the highest echelons of government power, these officials recognize that their positions are dependent

on the CPDM retaining power. Even the most starry-eyed CPDM stalwart would acknowledge that the CPDM would not fare so well without such an overwhelming financial advantage, providing a contrary incentive to turn off the official embezzlement that feeds CPDM party coffers.

¶10. (C) The good news about Cameroon's corrupted political system is that it cannot get much worse and, in fact, there are signs that the times may have begun to change, albeit at a glacial pace. In the current environment of anti-corruption crusading, the parties' fund-raisers may need to consider alternate sources for campaign funding, like higher party dues, or campaign methods less dependent on large cash outlays. Cameroon's media has yet to adequately fulfill its role in revealing the corrosive effects of the current system, and press vigilance will be necessary to any solution. We are optimistic that the trend towards greater transparency will continue, but recognize the need to keep up the pressure, in public and in private, for cleaner governance. End comment.

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